

South Oxfordshire District Council – Certification of Claims and Returns – Annual Report – Action Plan

Para no.	Finding	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action	Deadline
	Specific Claims				
17.	There was one adjustment to the claim for disabled facility grants. The officer preparing the claim had not realised the full amount paid up to the grant ceiling of £480,000 was claimable in 2008/09 (as opposed to 60% in 2007/08). This increased the amount of grant support to the Council in year by £33,772.	R2 The role of the Council in monitoring the accuracy of benefits processing to support correct payment of benefit during the year, and in completion of the housing benefit claim, should be strengthened	William Jacobs	Chief accountant to review completed claims and associated guidance notes before claims submitted	From Feb 2010
18.	For the claim for the pooling of housing capital receipts the initial claim amount of £376,072 was below the £500k ceiling on which we have to assess the control environment. Our review identified that this figure was inaccurate, and a second grant form with a value of £586,489 was submitted. We therefore carried out an assessment of the control environment before reviewing the claim. We again identified errors, and the final claim value we certified was £455,045. The errors led to an increased grant fee.	R1 Checking procedures for grants prepared in house should be reviewed to ensure claims are accurate.	William Jacobs	Chief accountant to review completed claims and associated guidance notes before claims submitted	From Feb 2010

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Inadequate trails to support pensions or state benefits					
21.	Recording of evidence to support pension or other state benefit payments within the housing benefit system was incomplete (partly due to a change in document imaging system), and when amounts were cross checked to the DWP system, the amounts used for benefit calculation was found to be inaccurate in a number of cases. This resulted in both under and overpayment of benefit to claimants. As we were unable to quantify the effect of this in the wider benefit population we included this information within our qualification letter.	In particular the Council should require: Better accuracy and recording of pension entitlements; and	Paul Howden	<p>It was discussed and agreed at a meeting with the Audit Commission on 24 February 2010 that this issue highlighted was around the lack of a visible audit trail. It was also accepted that under the DWP's own guidance, the claimant group involved in these cases are deemed low risk and therefore could acceptably not be reviewed for a number of years. It is therefore quite possible that pension figures may well show small variances from our systems and that these would only be corrected upon review.</p> <p>It is however agreed that Capita will ensure that where amendments have been made that an obvious clear explanatory audit trail will be documented for audit purposes.</p>	This has already been communicated to staff and will be reiterated in future training sessions.

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Misclassification of errors leading to overpayment of benefit					
25.	We identified one case within council tax benefit overpayments that had incorrectly been left as claimant error, when they should have either been local authority error. We therefore took a sample of a further 40 cases of claimant error overpayments (as required by the Department for Works and Pensions) to be checked initially by Capita.	In particular the Council should require: Improved accuracy in classification of benefit overpayments	Paul Howden	Capita has taken on board the lessons learned from the 08/09 subsidy review and the highlighted areas of error have been addressed with all assessment staff. The council's benefit team include subsidy classification within its own checking mechanism and errors are brought to the attention of Capita in order to identify training needs etc. Capita will conduct a review of the previously identified areas of incorrect coding prior to the submission of the 09/10 claim. With the combined efforts of both the council's 10% check, Capita's 35% check and the effective use of a newly introduced user/error matrix, coding errors should see a major improvement for the 09/10 subsidy claim.	This issue was addressed with staff in October 2009 and again in January 2010.
26.	They identified 16 cases where they considered the claimant error classification was incorrect. We sampled their results, and as we found errors in their testing we reviewed all 40 cases ourselves. We confirmed that 19 of the 40 cases were incorrectly classified.				Checking processes are ongoing and Capita's Contract Manager will be reviewing the specific subsidy cells before the grant claim is audited in May/June 2010.